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UNCLAS WARSAW 003578

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SUBJECT: TUSK EDGES OUT KACZYNSKI IN FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ROUND

REF: WARSAW 3557 AND PREVIOUS

**¶11.** (SBU) Summary: As predicted, Civic Platform's (PO's) Donald Tusk prevailed in the first-round of Poland's presidential election on October 9, and will face Lech Kaczynski in a second round of balloting on October 23. Despite only a three point margin over his rival, Tusk has bounced in post-election polls that show him beating Kaczynski by ten points. Election fatigue may explain the meager turnout (less than 50 percent). Populist Andrzej Lepper came in third, polling a surprising fifteen percent. The next government will not be named until after the October 23 run-off. End summary.

**¶12.** Donald Tusk won the first round of Poland's presidential election on October 9, beating Warsaw mayor and Law and Justice (PiS) candidate, Lech Kaczynski, by a slender three points. Tusk won 36.33 percent of the vote, just short of a 500,000 vote plurality over Kaczynski with 33.10 percent. Andrzej Lepper of Self-Defense came in a surprisingly strong third place, with 15.11 percent, and Marek Borowski, the strongest center-left candidate, won only 10.33 percent. Voter turnout was an all time low in post-communist presidential elections, with less than 50 percent of eligible voters participating.

**¶13.** Tusk and Kaczynski will face off in a second round presidential election on Sunday, October 23. Two polls released after the first round give a bigger electoral bounce to Tusk, who outpolled Kaczynski by ten and twelve points, respectively. Tusk won in ten out of sixteen provinces, with a lopsided majority in urban areas and among higher educated Poles.

**¶14.** Kaczynski won decisively in eastern and southern Poland, an area that in previous elections was a stronghold for former President Lech Walesa. Walesa, who has endorsed Tusk, may be sent out to stump for Tusk in the coming weeks, but questioned whether he would be effective. Walesa told Polish radio that he was bitter over the low turnout, and the need for an expensive, second round of elections.

**¶15.** Attention is now focused on the October 23 run-off, and whether third party voters will turn out in large numbers for either Tusk or Kaczynski. President Kwasniewski, widely viewed as a quiet supporter of Tusk, hinted that he might endorse a candidate before the second round. Center-left voters are likelier to gravitate towards Tusk, more from their dislike of Lech Kaczynski than from their enthusiasm for the PO candidate. Fully seventy percent of those who voted for Self Defense's Lepper are men. They are expected to break disproportionately for Kaczynski, who once again warned voters that PO and Tusk -- ironically, of course, PiS's coalition partner in governing Poland -- are risky free marketeers who want to tear apart Poland's social welfare net.

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Whither the Coalition  
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**¶16.** (SBU) PiS official Kazimierz Ujazdowski told DCM and PolCouns on October 11 that although there is no question that PO and PiS will form Poland's next government, if the campaign descends into harmful personal attacks it will make for more difficult cooperation between the two partners. On October 10 PiS candidate for prime minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz announced the broad outlines of the next government, focusing on curbing public sector corruption and "solidarity" with Poles who rely on the government's social safety net. PO party leader Jan Rokita, the anticipated deputy prime minister, said he was "eighty percent in agreement" with the PiS plan. However, economic policy, and how to maintain or dismantle that social safety net falls squarely in the tricky twenty percent separating the coalition partners.

**¶17.** (SBU) The Sejm is likely to convene its first official meeting on October 19, with Marek Belka continuing as a lame duck PM until the new government is announced in the days following the presidential run-off. PiS official Ujazdowski told us that the Marcinkiewicz government will definitely be in place by November 1 at latest. He reminded us that the

government begins to function as soon as it is named, and does not need to wait for the Sejm confidence vote. The new president will assume his office on December 23.

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